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SUPPORT TROOPS KEEP V CORPS' 1ST ARMORED DIVISION GOING ON MONTH-LONG EXERCISE

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GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany – Shooting the “big guns” has always been the focus of a gunnery rotation, but the Soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry of V Corps' 1st Armored Division know a unit moves, shoots and survives on more than just firepower.



SGT CHRISTOPHER STANIS

Sgt. 1st Class Richard Hoke (left), a medic platoon sergeant, and physician's assistant Capt. Eric Klage examine Pvt. Dustin Johnson's leg during a recent gunnery exercise at Grafenwoehr, Germany with their unit, the 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry of V Corps' 1st Armored Division. Johnson slipped on ice and fractured his ankle.

While gunnery puts the focus on the Soldiers who crew the unit's Abrams tanks and Bradley armored fighting vehicles, every troop -- from cooks and mechanics to medics, fuelers and ammo handlers, has to work together for success, 1-1st leaders say. The unit recently put that belief to the test during a month-long gunnery exercise here.

“You can’t move a tank if (the fuel tank) is empty; you need round of ammunition to fire weapons, and Soldiers like to be fed,” said the 1-1st’s senior enlisted Soldier, Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport.

"Everyone has a piece of the pie to make operations successful," said 1st Sgt.

Zaifuddin Graves of the 1-1st's Headquarters and Headquarters Troop.

And probably no one knows more about pie than the cooks who kept the squadron's dining facility running 24 hours a day during the exercise.



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Soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry of V Corps' 1st Armored Division line up for a meal at the unit's dining facility during the 1-1st's recent tank and Bradley gunnery exercise in Grafenwoehr, Germany. The facility fed 950 Soldiers a day during the exercise and stayed open 24 hours a day.

"We leave out soup and coffee for any Soldier who wants to come in at night and get something hot to eat or drink," said Pfc. Terry Johnson, a 127th Aviation Support Battalion food service specialist who was attached to the 1-1st for the gunnery rotation.

Johnson said the extra touches do a lot for

Soldiers' morale, because the dining facility gives them a place to "gather and unwind" while grabbing a snack, watching TV or playing cards.

Throughout the field exercise, the cavalry cooks served meals to 950 Soldiers a day.

"A lot of times it was hard work and long hours, but we were doing our job to make sure 1-1 CAV eats," said Spc. Gregory Cason, a cook assigned to HHT. "We go above and beyond the standard to put out quality meals."

While the cooks fueled troops, the squadron's petroleum supply specialists provided energy for the vehicles, pumping more than 100,000 gallons of fuel during the exercise.

Meanwhile, the handlers at the ammunition holding area distributed nearly 500,000 rounds -- everything from 5.56mm rounds, hand grenades and Claymore mines for individual Soldiers to 25mm and 120mm ammo for the Abrams and Bradleys' main guns.

But that fuel and ammo might not even make it to where it needs to be without mechanics.



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Sgt. Aaron Richards, a mechanic with Comanche Troop of the 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry of V Corps' 1st Armored Division, works on a Bradley armored fighting vehicle during the unit's recent gunnery rotation in Grafenwoehr, Germany.

"If people are trying to get a mission done, we make the mission happen," said 1-1st mechanic Spc. James Avent. "If they go out there and secure the world ... they need to be able to roll. Maintenance means movement."

Medics also play a critical role. A range can't even go "wet", or open for live fire, without a medic on site.

"We provide immediate attention if someone gets injured on the range," said Spc.

Ryan Willingham, a 1-1st medic. If the injury is minor, Willingham added, the Soldier can wait on the range until it is cleared. Otherwise he can be taken off the range immediately, or a 9-line medical evacuation request can be called in for serious injuries.

Over the course of the exercise, the squadron's medics treated more than 400 patients.

Unfortunately, Graves said, support troops often don't hear about how good a job they're doing until something goes awry.

He used the cooks as an example.

"If the food is bad (at the dining facility,) everybody knows about it. But if the food is good, the cooks don't hear a thing," said Graves.

But Lt. Col. John Peeler, the 1-1st commander didn't wait to salute the supporting players in the exercise, saying they did an excellent -- and critical -- job during the gunnery rotation.

"We can't do this without them," Peeler said.

